

Message

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**Subject:** Officials say Indorama Ventures' flare means systems worked properly

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# Officials say Indorama Ventures' flare means systems worked properly

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Comments



No emergency reported as Indorama Ventures loses unit and steam production, conducts flaring in Port Neches on Wednesday, March 9, 2022 Photo courtesy of Port Neches Fire Department / Photo courtesy of Port Neches Fire Department

Nearly two years following a chemical plant explosion, a Southeast Texas community once again saw black plumes rising from a facility into the sky on Wednesday in Port Neches.

But this time, emergency officials say, the flares and smoke clouds were a sign that a petrochemical plant's safety measures worked.

The Southeast Texas Alerting Network, along with emergency and city officials from Port Neches and Groves, reported shortly before 2 p.m. that the Indorama Ventures facility lost a unit and steam production, which resulted in a flare and black smoke. No emergency was reported as the facility's crews worked to resolve the issue and shut down operating units.

"Flares are safety devices that allow us to safely burn excess gasses," Indorama said in the STAN alert. "The safety of our employees, contractors, and the surrounding community is always our primary focus. No action is needed."

Groves Fire Chief and Emergency Management Coordinator Lance Billeaud informed the community that the flares would continue until the production units returned online and that there was not "any product release of any kind" and "no danger to the public."

"They will continue to monitor this throughout the process and keep in contact with local officials," Billeaud said.

About an hour later, Port Neches Fire Chief Eloy Vega told The Enterprise the situation appeared to be under control. While there were some flare flames from the units, he said there was no longer black smoke. Fire officials received an update from Indorama that assured crews were working to get the units back up. He said, as of press time, it was unclear if the units were 100% back online.

"From what we have learned in discussing this with our counterparts here at the Indorama facility, the loss of steam that is used to produce their product, that production decreased so they lost steam," Vega said. "That tripped a safety mechanism to relieve pressure from their line. When it relieves pressure, it goes out toward the outlets that point to the sky, resulting in that flame and excess product being evaporated and resulting in the black smoke."

"From what we have learned from the technicians at Indorama, the system worked as it should have, which again resulted in black smoke so that pressure was relieved from their lines," he continued. "They assured us that there was no on-scene emergency and no immediate threat to the surrounding communities."

On November 27, 2019, the Port Neches community awoke to an explosion — that at least one man described as the sun exploding — from the TPC Group Chemical Plant that burned for nearly a month. Area residents previously told The Enterprise that the explosion remains in the back of their mind and has made them nervous about seeing industrial flares.

"It depends on what day it is, but it can be an emotional roller coaster," Susan Miguez told The Enterprise a year after the incident. "Some days you go about your business and not think a lot

about it at all, but I get freaked out when I see the big flares. I can't help but wonder if they are going to keep getting bigger."

Vega said the officials strive to keep the concerned community safe and informed.

"There is no doubt when anybody would see the volume of smoke and flames coming from any facility, especially after the TPC incident, any community member would rightly inquire or ask what is going on, and they are entitled to know what is going on," Vega said. "That is our job to number one, find out about the nature of this situation and two, resolve it as needed."

Vega assured the community that emergency officials in Port Neches and their colleagues in the neighboring cities work closely with representatives from the local industry.

"When there is a situation like this, we have immediate contact with them to get a report of the situation, whether it is a routine flare up or whether it is a situation where there is a machine down or a system down that causes this type of situation when there is black smoke or possibly an emergency," he told The Enterprise on Wednesday. "We are either notified or we reach out to them and through these lines of communication we exchange information and if we need to take any action, we do so immediately, whether it is responding or putting information out to the community to let them know what is going on like it happened today."

"Situations like these whether it is like a technical, man-made or natural event those of us in the public safety sector are definitely monitoring the situation night and day," he continued. "So, we are on it for sure."

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